

Kurdistan: The State That Cannot Be

A Monograph

by

LTC(P) Jeffrey H. Powell, II
US Army



School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

2016

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				<i>Form Approved</i> OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)		2. REPORT TYPE SAMS Monograph		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) JUN 2015 – MAY 2016	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Kurdistan: The State that can never be				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) LTC(P) Jeffrey H. Powell, II				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) 201 Reynolds Avenue Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2134				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Command and General Staff College 731 McClellan Avenue Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-1350				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) CGSC	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT The United States withdrawal from Iraq in December 2011 reopened the debate over whether to satisfy the Kurdish desire for independence from their Syrian, Iraqi, Turkish, and Iranian neighbors. The question of whether recognition of an independent Kurdistan will promote regional stability contains four formal requirements under recognized international law. Among those requirements are a defined territory, a functioning government, and a capacity to enter into relations with the other states. The issue of whether recognition promotes regional stability involves determining whether the new state will have good relations with its neighbors and able to manage internal political conflicts. The answers to these questions can be found in the history of past attempts to create an independent Kurdistan, the history of Kurdish internal and external relations with the governments and peoples of the region, and in the record of the current Kurdish struggle against ISIL and actions of other regional states.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT Unclassified	b. ABSTRACT Unclassified	c. THIS PAGE Unclassified			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 913-758-3302

Monograph Approval Page

Name of Candidate: LTC(P) Jeffrey H. Powell, II

Monograph Title: Kurdistan: The State That Cannot Be

Approved by:

_____, Monograph Director
William J. Gregor, PhD

_____, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies
Henry A. Arnold III, COL, IN

Accepted this 26th day of May 2016 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Robert F. Baumann, PhD

The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other government agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

Fair use determination or copyright permission has been obtained for the inclusion of pictures, maps, graphics, and any other works incorporated into this manuscript. A work of the United States Government is not subject to copyright, however further publication or sale of copyrighted images is not permissible.

Abstract

Kurdistan: The State That Cannot Be by LTC(P) Jeffrey H. Powell, II, US Army, 44 pages.

The United States withdrawal from Iraq in December 2011 reopened the debate over whether to satisfy the Kurdish desire for independence from their Syrian, Iraqi, Turkish, and Iranian neighbors. Now, United States politicians are calling for Kurdish independence. Kurdish independence is a topic in the current Republican 2016 primary debates. For nearly 20 years, the US has enabled Kurdistan to grow into a viable state. The Kurds are capable of maintaining a military, controlling the Kurdish state territory, educating Kurdish children, and sustaining a Kurdish economy. Given these facts, the question is, would recognition of an independent contribute to regional stability?

The answer to the question of whether an independent Kurdistan will promote regional stability must address four formal requirements of international law. Among those requirements are a defined territory, a functioning government, and a capacity to enter into relations with the other states. The issue of whether recognition promotes regional stability involves determining whether the new state will have good relations with its neighbors and whether the state will be able to manage internal political conflicts. The answers to these questions can be found in the history of past attempts to create an independent Kurdistan, the history of Kurdish internal and external relations with the governments and peoples of the region, and in the record of the current Kurdish struggle against ISIL and actions of other regional states.

The evidence provided by the history of the long Kurdish struggle for independence indicates there are serious obstacles to independence. Those obstacles are conspicuous to the regional history. Given the number of nations in which Kurds live, there is no available territory for a Kurdistan greater than the current semi-autonomous province in Iraq. The various Kurdish populations lack unity, and the Kurdish state is unable to provide military, social, and economic programs for its people without large amounts of international assistance. It would be foolish for the United States to support Kurdish independence without the full support of the international and regional communities because a Kurdish state cannot be created without regional states ceding control of territory. Without the agreement of the various countries in which the Kurds reside, the Kurds must remain the subjects of the nations in which they live.

Contents

Acronyms	v
Figures	vi
Introduction	1
The Historical Narrative of the Kurds	6
Setting the Boundaries of Kurdistan.....	11
Four Sovereign Nations with Anti-Kurd Relations.....	11
The Montevideo Convention and defining international boundaries.....	24
The Dysfunction of the Kurds	30
Internal Strife among the Kurds.....	30
The Kurds Lack State Capabilities.....	35
Conclusion.....	39
Bibliography	42

Acronyms

GOI	Government of Iraq
ISIL/ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KDP	Kurdish Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdish Regional Government
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PJAK	Party for a Free Life In Kurdistan (Iran)
PKK	Kurdish Workers Party (Turkey)
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PYD	Democratic Union Party (Syria)
UN	United Nations
US	United States
YPG	Peoples Defense Units (Syria)

Figures

1	Kurdish Populations existing between Turkey and Syria	13
2	The “Green Line,” The United Nations Approved Boundary Between Iraq And The Kurdish Region.	17
3	Sykes-Picot Boundaries of 1916	26
4	Dispersion of Kurds throughout the Middle East based on Linguistics.....	28
5	Boundaries of Kurdistan as recognized by the Kurdish Institute of Paris, 2016.....	29

Introduction

With our Kurdish allies fully engaged in a fight to the death using inferior weapons and dangerously low on ammunition, the time for action, Mr. President, is now. Given the military exigencies, Mr. President, this letter may come to you as we collect additional signatures, and we are most heartened by reports that you are directing immediate supplies for the Kurdish forces facing ISIL.¹

Letter from Congressmen Dana Rohrabacher and Darrell Issa to President Barack Obama, August 18, 2014

With the penning of the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, Independence became, what is now, a long held dream of Kurdish independence. The last 94 years have provided the Kurds of the Middle East multiple opportunities to fight and die for an unachievable independence. The Kurdish struggle for independence adds to the instability of the region. Throughout the late 1990s and into the early twenty-first century, calls for independence from lobbyist, political dilantants, think tanks, and uninformed policy makers have exacerbated the issue. The calls for independence began at the end of Desert Storm in 1991 when international support for the Kurds reached a century high with Operation Provide Comfort. In the spring of 1993, Graham Fuller penned in *Foreign Affairs* “the Kurds in the Middle East can be put off no longer; it has now placed itself high on the agenda of Middle East Policy.”²

The United States withdrawal from Iraq in December 2011 reopened the debate over whether to satisfy the Kurdish desire for independence from their Syrian, Iraqi, Turkish, and Iranian neighbors. Now, United States politicians are calling for Kurdish independence. Kurdish independence is a topic in the current Republican 2016 primary debates. For nearly 20 years, the

¹ Dana Rohrabacher and Darrell Issa, August 18, 2014, Letter to the President, accessed January 31, 2016, <https://rohrbacher.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rohrbacher-urges-president-obama-to-arm-kurdish-forces>.

² Graham E. Fuller, “The Fate of the Kurds,” *Foreign Affairs*, 72, no. 2 (Spring, 1993), pp. 108-121.

US has enabled Kurdistan to grow into a viable state. The Kurds are capable of maintaining a military, controlling the Kurdish state territory, educating Kurdish children, and sustaining a Kurdish economy.³ On the verge of Kurdish independence again, current United States policies have embolden Kurdistan. The United States provides military training and funding in their fight against the Islamic State and, thereby, enables the Kurds to maintain their semi-autonomous region. The question has now become would an independent Kurdistan contribute to the stability of the region.

There currently exist three impediments to a United States decision of this magnitude. First, the United States supports a policy of one Iraq. There have been multiple calls for the subdivision of Iraq based on ethnicity and religious affiliation. The United States has fervently defended a policy of one Iraq. Second, would United States recognition of an independent Kurdistan, rupture a critical NATO relationship with Turkey? Turkey does not support an independent Kurdistan. The Turks believe an independent Kurdistan would exacerbate the current issues within their own borders with the Turkish-Kurd populations. Finally, the fight to contain ISIL in Northern Iraq and Syria has emboldened the Kurds to seize territory beyond the borders of Kurdistan Regional Government. United States recognition of an independent Kurdistan may inhibit the regional peace process within Syria, Turkey, and Iraq.

The question of whether recognition of an independent Kurdistan will promote regional stability contains four formal requirements under recognized international law. Among those requirements are a defined territory, a functioning government, and a capacity to enter into relations with the other states.⁴ The issue of whether recognition promotes regional stability

³ Charles King, "The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia Unrecognized States," *World Politics* 53 (July 2001) 525.

⁴ Yale Law School: Lillian Goldman Law Library. "The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy." Edited by Charles I. Bevans. 2008, accessed April 7, 2016, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/intam03.asp.

involves determining whether the new state will have good relations with its neighbors and able to manage internal political conflicts. The answers to these questions can be found in the history of past attempts to create an independent Kurdistan, the history of Kurdish internal and external relations with the governments and peoples of the region, and in the record of the current Kurdish struggle against ISIL and actions of other regional states.

A decision by the United States to recognize an independent Kurdistan must comprehend the impact of four conditions that for a very long time have impeded Kurdish aspirations for independence. The difficulty the Kurds face in achieving a US supported independence is contingent upon four factors. First, the US must understand the historical narrative between the Kurds and their neighbors. The narrative is not of peace, but of broken agreements, manipulation, and bloodshed. Second, the sovereign boundaries of the existing states do not match the vision of Kurdistan held by the Kurds. The negotiations of the final boundary will cede territory from at least one sovereign nation. Third, the internal political strife within Kurdistan must be resolved if Kurdistan is to function as a unified state. Finally, Kurdistan must build and maintain the capacity to function as a state beyond its own borders. Understanding these factors is imperative to a negotiated settlement in the post-ISIL environment. If the United States ignores the factors stated above, it could lead to a broader conflict, potentially dividing the war torn Middle East further, or worse yet, uniting the region against the Kurds in a concerted effort to prevent their statehood

The condition that needed to be addressed first was the historical effects of the relationships between the Kurds and the neighboring states of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. It is important to understand both the regional and Kurdish historical narrative that began long before the end of World War I, prior to the dream of Kurdish statehood. Kurdish history is tribal based. For the entirety of the Kurdish existence, the tribal chieftains have continually fought to survive and thrive among four neighbors: Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. The Kurds historical struggle for existence spans the period from before the time of the Crusades. Its modern international identity

begins with the Ottoman Empire and the end of World War I, through British Colonialism, to a struggle to coexist during the rise of the Ba'ath Party and the recent Gulf Wars. Each of these periods involved a relationship that influenced the history of the region. The Kurds, serving as proxies or allies, have balanced relationships with Great Britain, the United States, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey.⁵ Now, after hundreds of years of machinations between each of these states the Kurds face a new threat to their autonomy, the rise of the Islamic State.

The boundaries of the Middle East have been a source of tension since the end of World War I. For the Kurds to achieve independence, at least one country in the region must relinquish a portion of its sovereign state. Like many countries in the Middle East, the boundaries of Kurdistan have been defined by either Kurdish inhabitation or force of arms. From the Kurdish perspective, if Kurds inhabit a region, then that region is Kurdish and a part of Kurdistan. This argument impinges upon the sovereignty of no less than five countries, but directly affects Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq provides within its boundaries safe haven and support to multiple Kurdish factions. Those factions include the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey and the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK) in Iran. Those factions use the region to organize and refit.⁶ The KRG exacerbates their current relationships with their neighbors by failing to apprehend these groups and deny them safe-haven.

The third aspect that inhibits Kurdistan's ability to gain full autonomy is the internal strife between the ruling parties. The ruling parties have been defined by tribal lineage or urban-intellectual affiliations.⁷ In May 1992 two of the more influential tribal leaders, Massoud Barzani

⁵ David McDowall, "The Kurdish Question: A Historical Review," in *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, ed. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (London: Routledge, 1992), 10-11.

⁶ Vera Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds: A Dual Strategy for Freedom* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), 178-181.

⁷ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 343-

and Jalal Talabani, successfully began carving out a semi-autonomous region in Northern Iraq against the wishes of Iraq, Turkey, and Iran.⁸ This first step toward autonomy was also the first step toward a decade filled with bloody infighting based on a hundred years of distrust and political maneuvering by the ruling tribes, families, and rising parties. It was a period of civil war between separate Kurdish parties. UN resolutions, Iraqi Army interventions, and United States brokered agreements intended to bring stability and peace littered the decade of the 1990's. Finally, with the advent of the Second Gulf War, the Kurds were able to gain a level of stability within the region that previously had never existed. After 2003, Kurdish independence became a factor in every aspect of the ongoing conflict.

The final characteristic is Kurdistan's ability to behave like a state with its international partners. As an independent state, Kurdistan must observe international law. This will mean adhering to economic norms, conforming to international agreements, and respecting the sovereignty of its neighbors. Kurdistan has been sending emissaries abroad since 1992, but it still does not have the requisite international authority to commit to treaties and trade agreements unilaterally.

The Kurds' apparent meteoric rise towards independence is enhanced by its ability to influence the contemporary operating environment within the Middle Eastern area of operation. Each day that the Kurds succeed in the fight against the Islamic State; they gain territory and international credibility. In the age of social media and continuous news, the Kurds can control their own narrative. After 1922, the Kurds realized that they must be responsible for creating their own history. The rise of the Islamic State in Eastern Syria and Northern Iraq breathed new life into a long existing dream; Kurdish Statehood. The Kurds have been the only people with a land

345.

⁸ Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfeld, *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 172.

force that has successfully dislodged ISIL from its captured territories. The Kurds now govern space that they have long believed to be rightfully theirs: Kirkuk, Sinjar, and soon Mosul, long coveted jewels of Kurdish sovereignty. Having fought gallantly to seize these objectives, the Kurds may not willingly or easily return to their semi-autonomous regions.

A study of the four factors of historical narrative, sovereign boundaries, Kurdish internal politics, and Kurdish international relations strongly suggests that an independent Kurdistan would be detrimental to peace in the Middle East. Without gaining the support of the Kurdish Regional Government's neighbors of Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, it would be detrimental to US foreign policy, US international standing, and peace efforts in the region if the US were to unilaterally recognize Kurdistan.

The Historical Narrative of the Kurds

A sense of ethnic nationalism consumes the average Kurd. Kurds see themselves as separate and distinct from their Arab, Persian, and Turkic neighbors. Kurds believe that they are decedents of early Mede tribes; tribes of Indo-Aryan origin driven into the mountainous regions that border Iraq, Turkey, and Iran.⁹ Multiple cultural impacts influenced the evolution of Kurdish culture. Alexander the Great, the Mongols, Seljuk, Persians, and Ottomans have influenced Kurdish culture. The acceptance of these influences was a method for the Kurds to blend in to the prevailing ruling entity.¹⁰ Consequently, the way a Kurd defines their own "Kurdheti" has become more diverse based on the level of foreign influence, the Kurdish ability to work within the foreign influence, and Kurdish ability to maintain the Kurdish language and customs under

⁹ David McDowall, "The Kurdish Question: A Historical Review." in *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, ed. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (London: Routledge, 1992), 11-13.

¹⁰ Dana Adams Schmidt, *Journey Among Brave Men* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1964), 46-48.

that foreign influence.¹¹ The strength of the Kurdish tribal chieftains leadership and the distance from the foreign capital had a direct impact on the strength of foreign influence on the Kurdish culture. These individual chieftains were also a factor that contributed to the Kurds inability to find common ground between themselves because the emphasis on the tribe preserved local differences and disagreements within their culture.

In the modern era, the basis for Kurdish identity hinges on personal associations with existing political parties. Regional ties are drawn along patriarchal tribal lines and then subdivided again by religion or language. Kurds are a conglomeration of Arabic, Persian, and Turkic speaking people who are 80% Sunni in the northern regions of Kurdistan with the remaining 20% being “Twelver” Shia in the southern regions that border Iran. They share their Kurdish heritage with Christians, Jews, and Yazidis.¹² The vast differences among those who call themselves Kurds lead to a considerable amount of infighting. However, despite the constant friction, one thing remains true between them, they all see themselves as Kurds, and they all want their own nation-state regardless of where they live in the region.

The Kurdish influence in the region began with the Arab invasion of the 9th Century CE and the battles of the Crusades. The Arab and Persian inhabitants of the region admired Kurdish soldiers for their toughness and professionalism and Kurdish leaders rose to prominence in the Arab armies.

Kurdistan had a reputation similar to Scotland as an acknowledged source of good officers and troops. The most illustrious of these was Saladin who decisively defeated the Crusaders and established the Ayyubid dynasty in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq.¹³

¹¹ Denise Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 11.

¹² Martin van Bruinessen, "Kurdish Society, Ethnicity, Nationalism and Refugee Problems." In *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, ed. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (London: Routledge, 1992), 33-48.

¹³ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 22.

Saladin was born in Tikrit, now in modern-day Iraq, in 1137 AD. His family roots lay in the mountainous regions of present-day Turkey and Armenia. Saladin's father grew up in the city of Dwin, on the Aras River near the biblically notable Mount Ararat. Saladin's grandfather emigrated the entire family to Tikrit at the behest of Emir Mujahid Bihruz, a Kurd and the appointed governor of Baghdad under the Seljuk Turks. In Tikrit, Saladin's grandfather served as the emir of Tikrit. Upon the death of Saladin's grandfather, Saladin's father Ayyub assumed the duties of emir.¹⁴ Saladin grew up among leaders, understood politics, and traveled the entire region with his father and uncle. This experience introduced him to many cultures and many other leaders, which would enable him to coalesce the region under the banner of Islam during the crusades.

At the conclusion of the Third Crusade in 1191 Arab forces led by Saladin, defeated the armies of King Richard I, the Lionheart. Saladin's leadership and military prowess solidified the reputation of all Kurds serving in the Islamic Army as great warriors known for their courage and fearlessness. Saladin was not only a great fighter; he was a skillful politician who understood the cultural differences between Arabs, Turcoman, and Kurds. Saladin demonstrated his appreciation for the inherent friction between the peoples of the region when at the end of the third Crusade he knew that he could not leave the Kurds in charge in Acre.

Although his army contained disparate peoples, the ranks filled by Syrians, Egyptians, Turkomans and Kurds, Saladin knew his the garrison at Acre would fall because the Turks would not accept Kurdish leadership and the Kurds would not accept Turkish rule. Although the Kurds swore unswerving loyalty to Saladin, he understood the deep Trukish grievances, and, therefore, chose to maintain the cohesion of his army.¹⁵ Saladin's leadership throughout the crusades

¹⁴ Anne-Marie Edde`, *Saladin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 23.

¹⁵ Geoffrey Hindley, *Saladin: Hero of Islam* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2007), 175-179.

solidified his legendary reputation and led the Kurds to become an integral thread in the fabric within the region.¹⁶

In the 17th Century CE, the Kurds became the shield between the Ottoman capital and the conflicts in the outlying realm. The Kurds maintained this role within the Ottoman Empire until the middle of the 19th Century CE. The Ottomans maintained a tenuous relationship with the Kurds for two centuries while simultaneously manipulating them to counter Persian-Safavid influence in modern day Iran and Azerbaijan. As the Ottomans continued to wage war against the Persians, the Kurdish chieftains strengthened their control of the region of what is now Southeastern Turkey and Northern Iraq.¹⁷

At the end of the 19th Century, after two hundred years of semi-autonomous rule under the Ottomans, the first rise in Kurdish nationalism took place under Sheikh Ubaydallah of Nehri. Ubaydallah rose above the many sheikhs of Kurdistan through religious means, and maintained influence over many of the other Kurdish sheikhs as a sectarian authority. Ubaydallah seized on the achievements of other Kurds, and was able to coalesce the tribes into the Kurdish League in the 1870's and 1880's. Ubaydallah declared Kurdistan an independent state at the Treaty of Berlin in 1878.¹⁸ The Ottoman Turks and Qajar Iranians quickly defeated this attempt at

¹⁶ Anne-Marie Edde`, *Saladin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2. Edde` describes Saladin as the foremost example assumed by Arab Leaders in their quest for social acceptance as charismatic leaders.

And yet Saladin was not an Arab but a Kurd. Efforts have therefore been made to emphasize his linguistic and cultural "Arabness," his attachment to Islam, his respect for Arab values: hospitality, generosity, forbearance, honor, courage. These are all reasons why Arab leaders, however different they may be, have taken him as their reference point and adopted him as their hero. Both Gamal Abdel Nasser and Sadaam Husein indentified with Saladin, in order to style themselves as new charismatic leaders of the Arabs.

¹⁷ Jane Hathaway and Karl K. Barbir, *The Arab Lands under Ottoman Rule* (Harlow: Pearson & Longman, 2008), 181-182.

¹⁸ Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion*

independence by mobilizing disaffected tribes within their regions to defeat Ubaydallah.¹⁹ Although Ubaydallah failed to gain full autonomy, his actions were the first manifestation of Kurdish power under one leader since Saladin. Ubaydallah demonstrated to the international community that the Kurds had the ability to unite and held a desire for self-determination. At the same time the Ottomans were losing control of the region. Ubaydallah was , however, not the last leader to rise from among the Sheikhs.

At the outbreak of the World War I, the Kurds put aside any discussion of autonomy in favor of defending the region from Russian forces and fought valiantly for the Ottomans throughout eastern Anatolia. Over 500,000 Kurds served in the war, and they suffered nearly 300,000 casualties.²⁰ The Kurds, while known for their fighting prowess, were also responsible for assisting the Ottoman genocide against the Armenians. A horrific period that still has a chilling side effect within the region. The religiously based genocide aimed to prevent the Christian Armenians from supporting the predominantly Christian Russian forces in Eastern Anatolia; nearly one million Armenians perished at the hands of the Ottoman and Kurdish soldiers.²¹ However, the Kurdish dedication to the Ottoman-Turk cause did not come without some Kurdish expectations. The Kurds hoped that at the end of the nine years of brutal fighting in support of the Ottoman-Turks, the new Turkish government would support Kurdish independence. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk quickly dashed Kurdish hopes and the final boundaries in the region further divided the Kurdish nation.

1880-1925 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 1-8.

¹⁹ David McDowall, "The Kurdish Question: A Historical Review." In *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, ed. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (London: Routledge, 1992)10-32.

²⁰ Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion 1880-1925* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 15-17.

²¹ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 102-105.

Setting the Boundaries of Kurdistan

Four Sovereign Nations with Anti-Kurd Relations

The development of the Kurdish historical narrative influences directly the second condition of statehood, boundaries. At least four sovereign nations in the Middle East region will have to cede territory to create a free and independent Kurdistan. Those four countries are Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Each of those countries has long-standing distinct internal issues with their own Kurdish populations. The issues range from terrorist activities, separatist movements, to collusion with the international community to subvert their individual sovereign governments. Unless these long-standing internal issues are resolved, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria will never negotiate, support, or allow the recognition of a free and independent Kurdistan. The internal Kurdish issues in Turkey and Iraq are particularly acute. .

Among the four nations that border the KRG, Turkey harbors the deepest anti-Kurd sentiment. Turkey will never allow the existence of a free and independent Kurdistan within its borders or directly on Turkey's Southeastern boundary. Fundamentally, the Kurds refusal to accept a Turkish identity serves as the most divisive issue. The Kemalist elite of Turkey staunchly believe that the Turkey's success lies in a nationalist-secular identity. The Kurdish drive to maintain their own language, tribal culture, and Islamic centered governance precludes the Turks from accepting them into their culture.²²

The Kurdish Workers Party represents another divisive aspect in Kurd-Turk relations. Constant PKK terrorist activity directed against the Turkish government prevents the acceptance of any Kurds in Turkey. For nearly forty years, a battle has raged between the Turks and the PKK, and that fighting has caused the deaths of nearly 40,000 people, including civilians, Turkish

²² Vera Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds: A Dual Strategy for Freedom* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), 16-19.

soldiers, and PKK militants.²³ The PKK's separatist agenda, combined with a Marxist-Leninist ideology, further divides the Kurds from Turkish culture. The PKK conducts operations within Turkey, their primary residence. When under extreme military pressure, the PKK finds safe-haven in the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan in northern Iraq and Syria.

Turkey's tense relationship with Syria over Syrian support of the PKK has now evolved into an uncontrollable cross-border issue.²⁴ The besieged state of Syria, the rise of ISIL, and the success of Kurdish forces in fighting ISIL now intensifies Turkey's distrust of all international efforts to support the Kurds. Turkey considers efforts to support Kurdish PKK or YPG only as an effort to improve their international standing and to encourage Kurdish independence. The Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its militant wing the (YPG) are successfully defeating ISIL forces and securing territory. The reach of the PYD now extends nearly to the Mediterranean Sea. By linking the territorial gains by the PKK and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government, the Kurds could secure a port for a future free and independent Kurdistan.²⁵

The Kurdish gains on Turkey's southern border place the Turks in a precarious international position. Should Turkey attack the PKK to prevent a Kurdish state or should it fight ISIL to defeat militant Islam? This international conundrum is at the heart of Turkish disapproval of Kurdish autonomy. It seems likely that Turkey will choose to defend its sovereignty and maintain its policies and ignore international interests. As the rest of the international community attempts to contain the growing war, Turkish actions may have the unintended consequence of

²³ Vera Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds: A Dual Strategy for Freedom* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), 19.

²⁴ Editorial, New York Times, "Turkey puts US on spot for backing Kurds," *Honolulu Star Advertiser*, February 19, 2016: A5. Turkey considers the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its militant wing known as the People's Defense Units (YPG) to be a branch of the PKK.

²⁵ Adnan R. Khan, "Winning Against All Odds," *Macleans Magazine*, August 3, 2015, 32-36.

spreading the war. The threat of a Kurdish state is more important to Turkey than defeating ISIL.²⁶ Knowing that the Kurdish Regional Government located in northern Iraq supports the Syrian Kurds further drives Turkey to prevent the recognition of the Kurds.

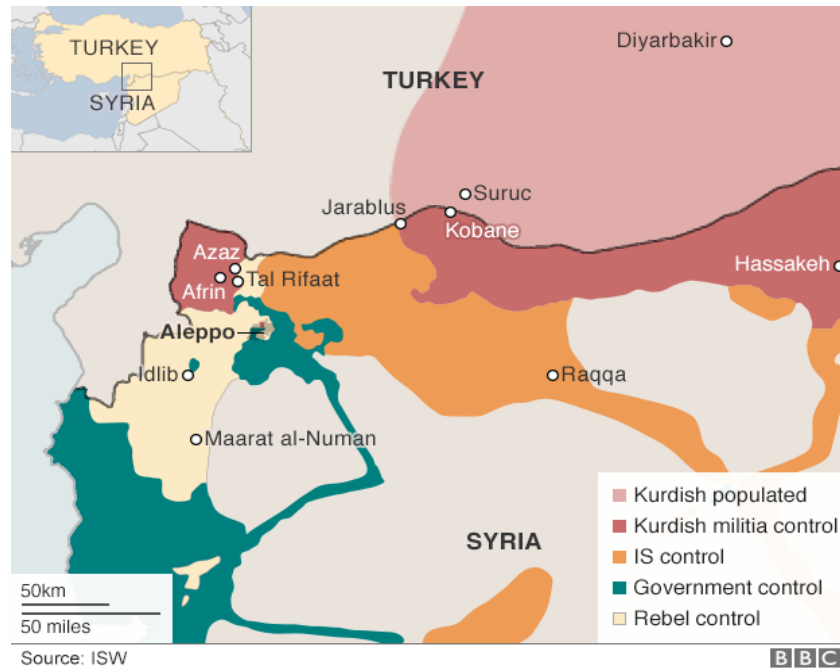


Figure 1. Kurdish Populations existing between Turkey and Syria

Source: BBC Monitoring Analysis, 19 February 2016, “Turkey v Syria’s Kurds v. Islamic State” accessed April 7, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33690060>.

The Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq poses no existential threat to Turkey, but it threatens to dissolve the country of Iraq. Since the end of World War II, the semiautonomous region existing in northeast corner of Iraq has been a thorn in the side of the Government of Iraq (GOI) in Baghdad. Periodically, the Kurds of the KRG have taken up arms

²⁶ BBC Monitoring Analysis, “Turkey v Syria’s Kurds v Islamic State,” February 19, 2016, accessed April 7, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33690060>.

against the GOI in pursuit of full autonomy. The KRG founder, Mullah Mustafa Barzani of the Barzan Tribe, entered Iraq with the permission of the new Baghdad government led by General Abdul Karim Kaseem in October 1958.²⁷ Baghdad legalized the Kurdish Democratic Party that same year, and within five years, the Iraqi government was embroiled in a civil war with the Kurds of northern Iraq.

Kaseem's overthrow in February 1963 opened the era of the Ba'ath Party in Iraq. The transition to Ba'ath leadership marked the beginning of 40 years of armed conflict between the Iraqi Kurds and the GOI in Baghdad. Upon assuming power, the Ba'ath Party undermined all of the negotiations and promises made by Kaseem's regime. The Ba'ath party did not believe that Mullah Mustafa Barzani or the KDP represented the Kurds.²⁸ The Ba'ath Party did not intend to cede northern Iraq to the KRG.

The constant struggle for autonomy between the KRG and the GOI began in earnest in 1963. Fierce fighting began in June 1963 when the Ba'ath Party worked to consolidate its control over the Kurdish region and put down Kurdish efforts to achieve full independence. In June 1963, the GOI imprisoned many of the Kurdish leaders. The government announced a bounty of one hundred thousand Iraqi dinars for the capture of Barzani. Following the arrests of the Kurdish leaders, the GOI surrounded the cities of Kirkuk, Erbil, and Sulimanyeh and subjected the cities to martial law, curfews, mass arrests, and deportations. The GOI deported 150,000 Kurds from

²⁷ Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds of Iraq* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1992), 11. Kaseem took control of Iraq through a military coup against the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq in October 1958. Kaseem would only control Iraq for two years before the Ba'ath Party overthrew him in February 1963. In April 1963, civil war erupted between the Kurds and the Ba'ath Government.

²⁸ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 324. "[Baghdad] was not convinced that either Mullah Mustafa or the KDP were true representatives of the Kurds. Rather, they seemed 'separatists, feudalists, and imperialist stooges', not 'loyal and true Iraqi-Kurds.'"

Kirkuk and bulldozed the Kurdish neighborhoods. The Ba'ath Party has had neither empathy for Kurdish autonomy nor compassion for the Kurdish people.²⁹

Iraqi subjugation and destruction of the Kurds continued with the initiation of a calculated genocide. The international community made no effort to stop the genocide or to protect the Kurdish region. The Anfal Campaign, which contained eight phases, began in January 1988. The campaign focused on ending Kurdish support to Iran and removing the Kurds in northern Iraq. Sadaam Hussein, the leader of Iraq, gave his cousin, Ali Hassan al-Majid, full authority to clear the region of Kurdish and Iranian collaborators during the final stages of the Iran-Iraq War. Ali Hassan ordered the execution and displacement of thousands of Kurds.

The systematic destruction had three goals. First, the GOI wanted to end Kurdish support for the Iranian efforts in northeastern Iraq. Second, the Iraqis wanted to punish the Kurds for assisting the Iranians. Finally, the GOI ensured that each action during the Anfal Campaign was aimed at further destroying the Kurdish population, its culture, and its attempts at maintaining a semi-autonomous region.³⁰ The Iran-Iraq War provided the GOI an opportunity to demonstrate their resolve to contain and destroy the Kurds within their borders. It was not until the post-Desert Storm era that Kurds were protected from Iraqi aggression.

The first international intervention on behalf of the Kurds in Iraq began after the defeat of the Iraqi Army during Operation Desert Storm in 1991. The war inspired the Kurds of Northern Iraq and the Shiite of Southern Iraq to take up arms against the GOI. Sadaam Hussein crushed the revolts in both regions. While the Shiites were left to defend themselves, the international community interceded in Northern Iraq to stop a second Kurdish genocide. The creation of a safe-

²⁹ Dana Adams Schmidt, *Journey Among Brave Men* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1964), 244-247.

³⁰ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 257-263.

haven emboldened the Kurds to seize the initiative and build up the semi-autonomous region. After Operation Provide Comfort in April 1991 and the establishment of Operations Northern Watch 1997, the Kurds were able to wrest control of Northern Iraq from Baghdad.³¹ The Kurds finally controlled a homeland of their own, but their fight with Sadaam Hussein and the GOI continued until the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The invasion of Iraq solidified the Kurdish Regional Government's hold on the north, creating a constant level of tension in the development the democratic government of Iraq. From 2005 until the US exit in 2011, the Coalition Force dealt with what was known as "Kurd-Arab" tensions as each side jockeyed for position along the existing "green line" (Figure 1).³² During the six years of constant political and military activity between the nascent GOI and the seasoned KRG, the United States played a pivotal role in preventing a violent incursion by either side.

³¹ Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: A Political Analysis*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 67 and 88.

³² Eugene Palka, "Kurd-Arab Tensions Along The Green Line: Iraq's Roadblock To Long-Term Stability," *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, 39, no. 1 (2011): 16-32.

Iraq Disputed Internal Boundaries



SOURCE: Unclassified map provided by U.S. Forces-Iraq.
RAND OP339-1.1

Figure 1. The “Green Line,” The United Nations Approved Boundary Between Iraq And The Kurdish Region.

Source: Larry Hanauer, Jeffrey Martini, and Omar Al-Shahery, “Managing Arab-Kurd Tensions in Northern Iraq after the Withdrawl of U.S. Troops,” Occasional Paper, Santa Monica: RAND: National Defense Research Institute, 2011, 4.

Unlike the history of Turkish and Iraqi relations with the Kurds, Iranian-Kurdish relations are not well documented. The Kurds of Iran live in the Khorasan Province that lies in the northwest corner of Iran. They migrated into the region in the 16th Century at the behest of the Ottoman Empire to serve as a buffer between the Persians and the Ottomans. Khorasan has long been the home to a diverse population of Kurds, Baluches, Lurs, Turks, Turkmens, Sistanis, Afghans, Azeri’s, and Arabs.³³ The Iranians allow the Kurds cultural freedom, but the Iranian

³³ Abas Ali Madih, "The Kurds of Khorasan," *Iran & the Caucasus* 11, no. 1 (2007): 11-31.

government will not accept political activity or aspirations of autonomy.

Iranian-Kurdish issues began at the end of World War I with the rise of Ismail Simko. After World War II, the Iranian government crushed the second Kurdish attempt to achieve autonomy during the inception of the Mahabad Government. During the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the Kurdish region became a safe-haven for the forces working to overthrow the Shah of Iran. The most costly interaction between the Kurds and Iran came during the Iran-Iraq War. The war caught the regional Kurds between the two nation states and decimated the Kurdish population. In each event, the Kurds failed to gain their independence or develop strategic long-term relations with the Iranian government.

At the end of World War I, as Iran was working to develop a new constitutional monarchy, the Iranian Kurds instigated further unrest in the interest of Kurdish autonomy in Iran. This was the first time that the Kurds attempted to separate themselves from the Iranian government. Leading the unrest was a powerful Kurdish Chieftain named Ismail Agha Simko. Simko wanted to form a Kurdish state and from 1918-1922 he successfully ruled from southwestern Iran to the Caucasus Mountains in northwest Iran. Simko capitalized on the weak Iranian government and its untrained army to stabilize a region for Kurdish autonomy. Once the Iranian government formed, and was able to function, the new leader of Iran Reza Khan led Iranian forces to defeat Simko in 1922. Simko fled to Turkey, but returned to lead another uprising again 1924 and was subsequently defeated and fled to Iraq. In 1929, Reza Shah's forces killed Simko when he returned to Iran for a final time.³⁴

The Iranians never treated the Kurds equally after the first uprising in 1918. Simko's

³⁴ Fereshteh Koohi-Kamali, "The Development of Nationalism in Iranian Kurdistan." in *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, ed. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl, 171-192. (London: Routledge, 1992), 175-176.

uprising was the first attempt in Iran to establish a Kurdish state. The tribal-based uprising failed. The failure hinged on the inability to motivate all Kurds based on the idea of a Kurdish identity or sense of nationalism.³⁵ The dysfunctional nature of the Simko's regime, coupled with the infighting between Kurdish tribal factions and the local Azeri population, prevented Simko from achieving long-term success. It also demonstrated to the Iranians how they could counter Kurdish efforts in the future by dividing them along ethnic and tribal fault lines. The Iranians capitalized on these methods in 1946.

Leading up to 1946, Iran experienced the turbulence of World War II. During the war, Iran was courted by Nazi Germany. Eventually a portion of the north was occupied by the Soviet Army, and the south fell under the rule of the British. Due to Reza Sha's perceived Nazi loyalties, the British forced him from office and replaced him with his incompetent son, Muhammed Reza.³⁶ From 1944 until 1946, the Kurds exploited the lack of Iranian central governance and created a Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iran. Centered on the city of Mahabad, located in Iranian-Azerbaijan, the Kurds developed the Democratic Party of Kurdistan-Iran in the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad. The Kurds worked to set up a government but lacked the economic, social, and political tools needed to succeed. The Kurds also lacked a modern army to defend itself. When the Soviet Army withdrew in 1946, the Iranian Army swept through the region. The Iranians captured and killed the Kurdish leaders, thus ending the Mahabad Republic.³⁷ Again, a host nation, Iran, had destroyed the dreams of Kurdish independence in order to maintain Iranian sovereignty.

³⁵ Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iran: The Past, Present and Future* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 12.

³⁶ Ibid, 13-15.

³⁷ Fereshteh Koohi-Kamali, "The Development of Nationalism in Iranian Kurdistan." in *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, ed. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (London: Routledge, 1992), 176-178.

After crushing the Kurdish independent region, the relationship between the Iranian government and the regional Kurds matured in a twisted manner. Iran developed a proxy relationship with Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq. The Iranians used the Kurds as a tool to implement policy against Iranian Kurds and against the GOI. This relationship existed through the 1950's, 60's, and 70's. During the 1970's and 80's, the Kurds played a pivotal role in the Islamic Revolution.

During the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the Shiite Militias of Ayatollah Khomeini used the Mahabad region as a support base. The Kurds provided logistical support to the militias and developed strong bonds with the ascending Shiite leadership. The Shiite leaders sympathized with the plight of the Kurds. This association with the revolution invigorated the Iranian Kurds to seize the opportunity to achieve their independence. In April 1979, the Iranian-Kurds presented an eight-point plan for Kurdish autonomy in northern Iran. Unlike 1946, Kurdish leaders in the region were organized, prepared to lead a government, and prepared to defend themselves. The Khomeini-led government saw the program as an affront to its leadership and brutally destroyed the Kurdish leadership and the supporting population.³⁸ The Kurds failed to achieve independence from a second Iranian regime and, thus, continued insurgent efforts to gain independence through the 1980's.

The Iranian government leveraged the Kurdish populations of both Iran and Iraq throughout the next two decades, including the US-led invasion of Iraq. The Iranians used the Kurdish region to move between Iraq and Iran. Iran also used the Iranian-Kurdish region to position blocking forces to prevent potential US incursions into Iran. The Iranian government also facilitated the major Shiite parties in Iraq after the formation of the government in 2005;

³⁸ Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iran: The Past, Present and Future* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 22-26.

supporting the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq and the Da'wa party. These two parties have directly challenged Kurdish efforts for autonomy in Iraq, fearing that the autonomous region will spread to the Iranian Kurdish region.³⁹ While the Iranians successfully contained the Iranian-Kurds in the post US-led invasion of Iraq, their regional partner of Syria is collapsing under the weight of civil war, ISIS occupation, and the Kurdish YPG.

Syria is a microcosm of the post-World War I environment. Comprised of Arabs, Christians, and Kurds the region provided distinct challenges to the French Mandate of 1920. The French envisioned sub-dividing the region into three domains in order to dominate the populations and maintain order. The Arab populations would occupy the southern regions of Syria. A Christian enclave, which later became the state of Lebanon, would occupy the coastal region. The Kurds would occupy two areas, the Kurd-Dagh located north of Aleppo and the Al-Hassakh Province located in the northeast corner of Syria, along the border with Turkey and Iraq. Each region was to be semi-autonomous.⁴⁰ Once again, the Kurds had received the promise of autonomy.

The Kurdish actions during the French Mandate through Syria's independence set the conditions for the Syrian disdain for Syrian Kurds. At the beginning of the French Mandate, French policies advocated the sub-division of Syria in smaller, more manageable regions. The French plan triggered an Arab-nationalism backlash against the minority Christians and Kurds. The Syrian-Arabs viewed the Kurdish leaders support of the French ideals of creating minority states within the region, particularly, the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, as evidence of hostility toward Arab-nationalism. French use of Kurdish soldiers to quell Arab uprisings

³⁹ Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iran: The Past, Present and Future* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 79-82.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 27-30.

disparaged further the Kurdish image.⁴¹ The Kurdish support did not ingratiate itself with rising Arab-nationalists, and as the French began to lose control of Syria, the French abolished Kurdish autonomy as the first step toward appeasing the Arabs.

With Syrian independence in 1946 and the rise of Arab nationalism throughout the region in the 1950's, the full marginalization of the Kurds in Syria was complete. Each successive dictator in Syria from 1946 through 1961 tightened his control over the Kurdish population by banning their language, publications, and eventually arresting the political leadership of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria. The Syrian government saw the Kurds as a separatist group. In 1962, in an unprecedented move, the Syrian government conducted a one-day census in the Al-Hassakh province. This long-diverse region had been a safe-haven to multiple minority groups, especially Kurds fleeing from persecution in Turkey and Iraq. Many of the Kurds had no documentation of citizenship or land ownership, and immediately were stripped of their Syrian citizenship. The census stripped approximately 150,000 Kurds of their Syrian citizenship and lands. The ramifications of the census did not end in 1962, but continued to manifest itself in a long enduring state policy toward reducing Kurdish influence in Syria.⁴²

The census emboldened the Syrian government to further drive a wedge between the Arab population and the Kurdish enclaves. In November 1963, the head of internal security in the Al-Hassakh province published a twelve-point plan to excise “a malignant tumor that had developed in the body of the Arab nation.”⁴³ The Syrian government never openly acknowledged

⁴¹ McDowall, David. *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 468-471.

Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 32-34. The Syrian government placed the Al-Hassakh Kurds into one of three categories: 1) Kurds that could prove Syrian citizenship, 2) Classified as “foreign” and considered to be migrant or illegal immigrants, 3) or “unregistered” if they did not participate in the census – even if they were Syrian citizens.

⁴³ Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People* (London: Pluto Press, 2007),

the twelve-point plan but by 1973, multiple facets of it were in effect across northern Syria. The most dramatic of these points was the creation of an “Arab Belt” on the northern border between Syria and Turkey. Despite the Syrian government’s drastic actions of discrimination, there has been little violence between the Syrian-Arabs and the Syrian-Kurd population.

The divide between the Syrian-Arabs and Syrian-Kurds closed in the 1980’s with the rise of President Hafiz al-Assad. Assad, a Shiite-Muslim and an Alawite, learned how to leverage the Kurds against his enemies early in his regime. He was supported the Kurds in northern Iraq against his rival Sadaam Hussein, and placed Kurds into the elite forces that guarded his regime. Assad considered the Kurds a valuable asset to his government. Although Assad considered the Kurds loyal and disciplined fighters, they were not allowed to become officers within the elite guards. Assad formed special Defense Brigades, comprised of Kurdish soldiers, who spoke Kurdish, but were led by an Alewite officer. Assad used the Defense Brigades to suppress the Sunni-Arabs within Syria. These actions also exacerbated anti-Kurd sentiment between Sunni-Arabs and the Kurds.⁴⁴

Even with the tense relationship between Kurds and Sunni-Arabs, the Syrian-Kurds enjoyed relative peace within the borders of Syria until the collapse into civil war in 2011. For the

34-35. In November 1963, Lieutenant Muhammad Talab Hilal, head of internal security in the Al-Hassakh Province published the confidential report “Study of the National Social and Political Aspects of the Province of Jazira.” His twelve point plan reads like a roadmap to genocide: 1) displace Kurds from their lands, 2) deny education to the Kurds, 3) return “wanted” Kurds to Turkey, 4) deny employment opportunities to Kurds, 5) publish anti-Kurdish propaganda, 6) replace local Kurdish clerics with Arab clerics, 7) implement a “divide and rule” policy within the Kurdish community, 8) settle Arabs in Kurdish areas, 9) establish an Arab cordon sanitaire along the border with Turkey, 10) establish collective farms for Arab settlers, 11) deny the right to vote or hold office to anyone not speaking Arabic, and 12) deny Syrian citizenship to non-Arabs wishing to live in the area.

⁴⁴ Ismet Cheriff Vanly, "The Kurds in Syria and Lebanon." in *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, ed. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (London: Routledge, 1992), 158-160.

first time in 60 years, the Kurds saw an opportunity to seize their independence from the Syrians. As the war evolved into a battle of ideologies between Alewite Shiite-Muslims and Sunni-Arabs, the Kurds reignited Kurdish nationalism through the Democratic Union Party (YPD). The sense of Kurdish nationalism within Syria has drawn fighters from the nation of Kurds spread throughout the Middle East and Europe. The Kurds have built the most lethal fighting force in the civil war and in the battle to defeat ISIS.⁴⁵

Each of the distinct relationships between the Kurds and their neighbors demonstrates one similar feature; none of the countries is willing to support an independent Kurdistan within its borders. In order for Kurdistan to become an independent nation, one or all of the countries within the region will have to cede territory to the Kurds. Defining boundaries of an independent Kurdistan beyond the existing KRG of Northern Iraq will require clear negotiations managed at the international level, adhering to international law and existing treaties, and recognizing majority populations.

The Montevideo Convention and defining international boundaries

In order for an independent Kurdistan to exist, it must first meet the standards of the Montevideo Convention of 1933.⁴⁶ The Montevideo Convention defines what a state is in the

⁴⁵ Aaron Stein and Michelle Foley, "The YPG-PKK Connection," *Atlantic Council* (January 26, 2016): 1-3.

⁴⁶ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Montevideo Convention", accessed April 07, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/event/Montevideo-Convention>.

[The]Montevideo Convention, in full Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, agreement signed at Montevideo, Uruguay, on December 26, 1933 (and entering into force the following year), that established the standard definition of a state under international law. Adopted by the Seventh International Conference of American States, the convention stipulated that all states were equal sovereign units consisting of a permanent population, defined territorial boundaries, a government, and an ability to enter into agreements with other states.

eyes of the international community. The first article of the treaty provides a clear definition of a state. "The state as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: a) a permanent population; b) a defined territory; c) government; and d) capacity to enter into relations with the other states." ⁴⁷

The Kurds possess a permanent population within the region; it is the boundaries that are problematic. The boundaries of an independent Kurdistan must be formed through multi-lateral international negotiations, adhere to international law and existing treaties, and recognize the sentiments of the majority populations within the regions that will form an independent Kurdistan. Given that the current boundaries of the modern Middle East were set in 1924, redrawing them will be a herculean task. All existing boundaries excluded an independent Kurdistan.

At the conclusion of World War I, the entire Middle East was in disarray and the boundaries throughout the region were unrecognizable to the inhabitants. Three treaties influenced the final boundaries that separate twenty-first century Turkey and Kurdistan. The first was the abandoned Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which redrew the boundaries of the region leaving the former Ottoman Empire a shadow of itself governed by the Triple Entente of the Britian, France, and Russia. It also carved out sections of Turkey for Greece and Italy.⁴⁸ The Allies discarded the Sykes-Picot Agreement (shown in Figure 3) in 1918 due to changes in policy and the United States' participation in post-war negotiations. The Sykes-Picot agreement did not include any language granting autonomy to the Kurds, nor did it provide them separate territory.

⁴⁷ Yale Law School: Lillian Goldman Law Library. "The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy." edited by Charles I. Bevans. 2008, accessed April 7, 2016, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/intam03.asp.

⁴⁸ David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989), 188-199.



Figure 3. Sykes-Picot Boundaries of 1916

Source: Editorial, *Al Jazeera*, “Were Arabs betrayed by Sykes-Picot? Britain and France carved up the Middle East following the Ottoman defeat in 1918,” February 12, 2008, accessed April 4, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/focus/arabunity/2008/02/200852518563324466.html>.

The second failed attempt to redraw the boundaries of the Middle East was the Treaty of Sevres. The British-led negotiations focused on reducing Turkish influence in the region and enabling the minority populations’ semi-autonomy under British colonial guidance. This method achieved US President Woodrow Wilson’s goals outlined in his Fourteen Points Speech. The British intended to use the Kurds as an instrument to control the region between Turkey, Iran, and Mesopotamia (Baghdad). It was under these auspices that the British supported Kurdish

independence.⁴⁹ The treaty specified under Article 62 that the Kurdish people would achieve “a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia.”⁵⁰

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the rising ruler of Turkey, abrogated the Treaty of Sevres and fought to consolidate control over Turkey. The rise of the Nationalist Turks led to new fighting between the Greeks, the Armenians, and the Turks. One of the great ironies of this period is that the Kurds supported Ataturk, both politically and militarily, believing that their support would gain them the independence they sought.⁵¹ Kemal manipulated the Kurds and eventually defeated the Greeks and Armenians, negotiating new terms with the Allies in the Treaty of Lausanne. The Treaty of Lausanne removed the threat of autonomous Kurds and Armenians by drawing the boundaries to divide those peoples between areas controlled by Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Colonial Iraq. Treaty of Lausanne drew most of the current boundaries in the Middle East, boundaries that have led to nearly 100 years of turmoil in the region, and have set the conditions for the Kurdish national unrest.⁵²

Kurdish unrest exists not only in Northern Iraq, but also in the neighboring five countries that must agree to redraw the boundaries to create Kurdistan. The countries of Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Turkmenistan are home to portions of the modern Kurdish population. The

⁴⁹ Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion 1880-1925* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 52-54.

⁵⁰ Richard Hacken, *The World War I Document Archive* (February 1996), accessed January 19, 2016, http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Main_Page.

⁵¹ David McDowall, "The Kurdish Question: A Historical Review," in *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, ed. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (London: Routledge, 1992), 10-32.

⁵² Richard Hacken, *The World War I Document Archive* (February 1996), accessed January 19, 2016, http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Main_Page.

distribution of Kurds based on linguistics spans from central Turkey to as far east as southern Iran (Figure 4). While the northern region of Iraq is the most familiar Kurdish region in the media, nearly 43% of the perceived “Kurdistan” lies in Turkey, 31% in Iran, 18% in Iraq, 6% in Syria, and 2% within Russia.⁵³

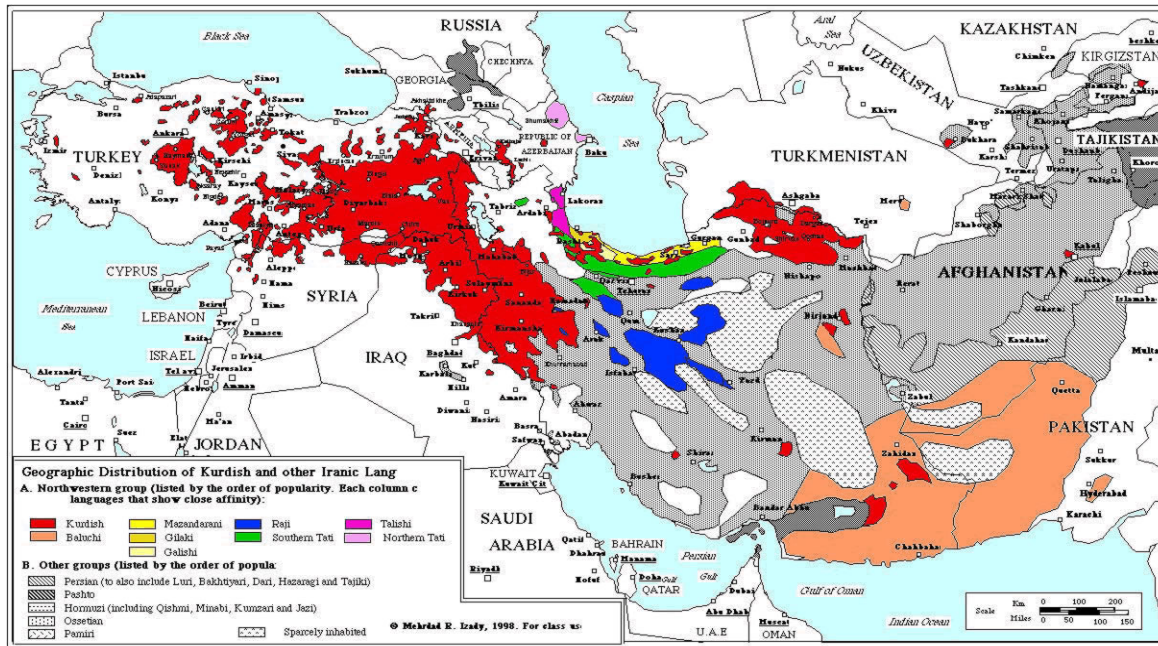


Figure 4: Dispersion of Kurds throughout the Middle East based on Linguistics

Source: Kurdish Institute of Paris, “The Kurdish Diaspora” accessed January 18, 2016. http://www.institutkurde.org/images/cartes_and_maps/geographi.jpg.

The map in Figure 5 best describes the perceived boundaries of Kurdistan in the eyes of the Kurdish people. Kurdistan, from the perspective of the average Kurd, extends from Diyala Province located north of Baghdad, north along the boundary of Kirkuk Province and the city of Kirkuk, across the northern section of Ninawa Province, including the city of Dohuk. The region consumes nearly one third of northern Iraq, including the fertile mountainous area. Iraqi

⁵³ Denise Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 26.

Kurdistan provides the greatest stability for all Kurds in the region, a virtual safe haven. The semi-autonomous region forms a link between the Kurds of eastern Turkey and those in southwest Iran. Following the first Gulf War and Operation Provide Comfort, the Kurdish borders within Iraq remained constant from 1992 until 2004. The semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan supports the Kurdish populations in both Turkey and Iran, while maintaining influence in Syria.



Figure 5. Boundaries of Kurdistan as recognized by the Kurdish Institute of Paris, 2016.

Source: Kurdish Institute of Paris, “The Kurdish Diaspora” accessed January 18, 2016.
http://www.institutkurde.org/en/kurdorama/map_of_kurdistan.php.

Each of the previous maps provides insight into the history of the region. The maps show the geographic dispersion of Kurdish people and the Kurdish vision of their own boundaries. It is imperative to see these representations to understand the physical dynamics of the relationships between the interlocutors. While the maps indicate how the boundaries have been drawn and the

difficulty of redrawing the boundaries to create an independent Kurdistan, they do not explain why Turkey, Iraq, Syria, or Iran have not and are unlikely to ever grant their own Kurdish people greater autonomy.

The Dysfunction of the Kurds

Internal Strife among the Kurds

The fight against ISIS has given Kurds across the Middle East a common cause for the first time since the end of Ottoman rule in 1918. Although the Kurds look to have organized across a wide front, the current situation is only a aberration to the Kurds inability to unify. Even with the common struggle against ISIS, one of the greatest obstacles to gaining full autonomy is the internal strife between the ruling parties. The internal strife, in turn, reflects how the ruling parties were founded. The ruling parties are based on either tribal lineage or urban-intellectual affiliations.⁵⁴

The ruling parties of the long-standing Kurdish Regional Government in Northern Iraq appear as one entity, but, in fact, the KRG is divided between the north? led by the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the south led by Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Two groups are at the center of that tenuous stability, the Barzani Clan leading the KDP and the urban-intelligentsia under Jalal Talabani, leading the PUK.⁵⁵ The Kurds have been involved in multiple climactic struggles over the past seventy years. In 1946, they were involved in the Mahabad Republic. In the Sixties and Seventies, the Kurds fought for autonomy with the rise of Ba'ath Party in Iraq. In the Eighties, the Kurds suffered the second greatest genocide of the 20th Century. Through each struggle, the two factions have remained at the forefront of the fighting,

⁵⁴ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*. (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 343-345.

⁵⁵ Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 164-165.

negotiations, and nation building within the KRG. It is because of these two factions that the Kurds will never reach full independence.

Mullah Mustafa Barzani is the patriarch of modern-day Kurdistan. Born in partnership with the urban intellectual Ibrahim Ahmed established the KDP in Iraq. These leaders understood that they complimented each other's skills; Mullah Mustafa had the popular support, and Ahmed possessed the policy understanding of the urban and national stage. The formation of a single party was meant to unify the Kurds under a common a cause. The unfortunate truth of the alliance was that the two groups viewed autonomy differently. The urban intellectuals viewed the tribal leaders as antiquated leaders focused on maintaining their positions; lacking political understanding, and incapable of negotiating. The tribal leaders believed that the intellectuals threatened the land-holdings that directly influenced their political standing.

The political divide between the Iraqi-Kurds began manifesting itself in 1963, when Mullah Mustafa Barzani accepted peace terms without gaining the approval of the KDP. While the tribal leaders were satisfied with Barzani, the urban-intelligentsia felt that Barzani has sacrificed Kurdish autonomy. The agreement allowed the Kurds to maintain their cultural and tribal activities, but it banned the KDP. The agreement also allowed Iraqi military forces to return unopposed to the region, and occupy garrison in Northern Iraq.⁵⁶

As the party splintered, a young urban-intellientual by the name of Jalal Talabani began his ascendance to leadership within the Kurds. Talabani, a lawyer like Ibrahim Ahmed, gleaned his understanding of Kurdish politics from both Barzani and Ahmed. Barzani is said to have treated Talabani as a son, but often Talabani fell out of favor due to his political views on the

⁵⁶ Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 166. "The policies of Baghdad and Mullah Mustafa's acceptance of them resulted in the urban nationalists splitting from the tribal leadership, and this tit-for-tat squabbling did little to enhance the strength-in-unity of the Kurdish national movement."

effect tribalism had on Kurdish policies. Talabani traveled extensively in the Sixties, gleaning governance advice in Egypt, Algeria, and Jordan. Talabani used this knowledge to shape policies with Ibrahim Ahmed. These isolated decision frustrated Barzani, and he began referring to Talabani and Ahmed at the “Mawat Empire.” These seeds of discord led to Talabani reaching out directly to the Baghdad government in 1968.⁵⁷

The Ba’ath Party recognized the divide between Mullah Mustafa and the Ahmed-Talabani faction and exploited it throughout the Seventies. The Kurdish infighting enabled the GOI to return in 1970 to negotiate terms that it believed would stabilize their control over the economic, political, and military aspects of the country. The “March Agreement” of 1970, negotiated by then Ba’ath Party Vice President, Sadaam Hussein, granted the Iraqi-Kurds their greatest level of autonomy achieved before 2003. The agreement provided the Kurds with an official language, guaranteed representation in the GOI, land rights, and free return of displaced Kurds. The agreement never came to fruition, as the GOI attempted to assassinate Mullah Mustafa Barzani in September 1971.⁵⁸

Barzani continued to lead the Kurds until 1975. In that year, the Kurdish Revolution in the north came to an abrupt end. Sadaam Hussein defeated the Kurds militarily through a masterful political maneuver. At the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries conference in March 1975, Sadaam cut off the Kurds military supply lines from Iran by coming to an accord with the Shah of Iran. The political maneuver forced Barzani to cease military operations and to flee the country. The Kurdish region, its political party, and its people were in complete

⁵⁷ Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: A Political Analysis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 24-26.

⁵⁸ Quil Lawrence, *Invisible Nation: How the Kurds' Quest for Statehood is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East* (New York: Walker & Company, 2008), 20-22.

disorder.⁵⁹

On June 1, 1975, Jalal Talabani announced from Damascus, Syria the founding of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. The party's foundation was the urban-intelligentsia; Marxists from the Komala organization led by Noshirwan Mustafa Amin, and the Socialist Movement of Kurdistan led by Ali Askari. The formation of the party became so contentious that Askari was captured and killed by the KDP in 1978.⁶⁰ The rift between the Kurdish north and south was complete. Now the Kurds not only fought the GOI, but they fought each other for control of the people, resources, and support.

The Iran-Iraq War drove the division between the Kurdish factions even deeper, as the Northern KDP supported the Iranians and the southern PUK liaised with the Iraqis.⁶¹ The constant turmoil between the two parties continued through the dark times of the Eighties, and the GOI of Iraq seized on the discord to decimate the Kurds through the Anfal Campaign. When Sadaam invaded Kuwait in July of 1990, the Kurds were not even an issue to him, the GOI, or the Iraqi military.

As in multiple other cases throughout the region's history, the Kurds used political turmoil and failure by their host nation as a springboard to Kurdish autonomy. When the coalition forces defeated Iraq and expelled them from Kuwait, the Kurds seized the opportunity to secure Kurdish independence. The Kurds began their insurrection within weeks of Sadaam's defeat, with the expectation that Western nations and regional neighbors would support Kurdish efforts to

⁵⁹ Quil Lawrence, *Invisible Nation: How the Kurds' Quest for Statehood is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East* (New York: Walker & Company, 2008), 167 and 334. In less than four years, the Kurds thrust into deeper discord as Mullah Mustafa Barzani died of cancer and his son Massoud ascended to lead the KDP in March 1979.

⁶⁰ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 344.

⁶¹ Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: A Political Analysis*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 24-26.

destabilize the Ba'athist regime. The support never came to the Kurds, as the United States, Turkey, and Iran were not prepared for the “sudden appearance of ‘Iraqi Kurdistan’ as a de facto state.”⁶² Sadaam quickly realized the Kurds were helpless, and he quickly moved to crush the rebellion.

Unlike any other time in history, the world coalesced to save the Kurds from complete destruction at the hands of the Iraqis. The 24-hour news cycle bombarded the world with pictures of the displaced Kurds at the Turkish and Iranian borders seeking aid. The United Nations intervened and passed UN Security Council Resolution 688 demanding an end to Sadaam's vindictiveness toward the Iraqi people. The Coalition established a “No-Fly Zone” over the northern and southern regions of Iraq to protect the Kurds and the Shiite populations. Although the international efforts slowed Sadaam's attacks, but the onslaught ended because both sides were completely debilitated from constant conflict.⁶³

Although the Iraqi onslaught had ended, the brutal infighting between the KDP and the PUK was merely beginning. For the first time since the end of World War I, the Kurds managed their own destiny. Although the Iraqi Kurdistan Front brought diverse parties together in Kurdistan in May 1992 to hold elections, long standing rivalries tore the government apart within two years. By December 1993, armed conflict raged between the KDP and PUK. The preeminent reason for the fighting was a lack of leadership within the KRG, because both Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani had relinquished their roles to lesser lieutenants. The 50-50 split within the

⁶² Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 171-172. “It is perhaps to be expected that the sudden appearance of ‘Iraqi Kurdistan’ as a de facto state caused considerable consternation in Ankara and Tehran. Western capitals were similarly perplexed as they were faced with the diplomatic from the new entity...”

⁶³ Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 171.

government between the two parties created friction and stalemates that the junior leaders could not overcome. When frustrations reached epic proportions, the Kurdish civil war began.⁶⁴

The Kurdish civil war was resolved on September 17, 1998 through negotiations overseen by the United States and signed by Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani in Washington D.C.⁶⁵ The four years of civil war had torn the region apart. The First Gulf War and subsequent 12 years of economic sanctions allowed the Kurds to reach a rapprochement with the GOI of Iraq, that was too debilitated subdue the Kurds. During the interwar period between the First Gulf War and the Coalition Invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Kurds worked diligently to develop the KRG. Unfortunately, Kurdistan lacked an economy, an effective government, or a well-trained and equipped army to defend itself; three key aspects to being able to behave like a state within the international community.

The Kurds Lack State Capabilities

The aforementioned Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, a signed treaty recognized under international law, provides the guidelines for international statehood. In order for the Kurds to achieve international statehood, their government must be able to provide for its permanent population, within recognized international borders, and be able to enter into relations with the other states.⁶⁶ Between 1998 and 2003, Kurdistan achieved an arrangement with the GOI granting them autonomy. The Kurds were helping Iraq to sidestep sanctions by smuggling oil from Mosul to Dohuk into Turkey. In exchange the GOI allowed Kurdistan to

⁶⁴ Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: A political analysis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 67-75

⁶⁵ Ibid, 100-101.

⁶⁶ Yale Law School: Lillian Goldman Law Library, "The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy," edited by Charles I. Bevans. 2008, accessed April 7, 2016, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/intam03.asp.

operate in nearly autonomously.⁶⁷ Kurdish autonomy now meant Kurdistan could continue to build its local economy, educate its people, and maintain the Kurdish armed forces.⁶⁸ The biggest question became how would Kurdistan promote these activities without a constant revenue stream, a recognized international government, or the ability to enter into security treaties or agreements to protect its nascent sovereignty.

The Kurdish Regional Government exists as a “dependent Quasi-state” whose economy is founded on smuggling, unstable oil development ventures, and inconsistent state assistance from the weak Government of Iraq.⁶⁹ For the KRG to become legitimate, the Kurds must find an economic policy that is sound, based on assets the KRG controls, and that comply with international laws and norms. Currently, the KRG depends on developments in Kirkuk Province to build KRG’s financial capabilities. On June 12, 2014, upon defeating ISIS forces, the Kurds assumed control of Kirkuk City and a large portion of the province. Through control of the rich Kirkuk oil fields and refining capability, the Kurds have been able to export 200,000 barrels of oil a day through Turkey.⁷⁰ The 200,000 barrels, at the price of \$31/barrel, does not replace the one billion dollars per month cut in shared revenues that Baghdad implemented in January 2014. The oil revenue has been a zero-sum gain and the Kurds rely on international loans amounting to \$730 million a month to maintain day-to-day governmental operations.⁷¹ Oil is the sole source of Kurdish revenues.

⁶⁷ Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 178-80.

⁶⁸ Charles King, “The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia Recognized States,” *World Politics* 53 (July 2001) 525.

⁶⁹ Denise Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State: Development and Dependency in Post-Gulf War Iraq* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 48-50.

⁷⁰ Piotr Zalewski, “A Petro State of their own for the Kurds,” *Bloomberg Businessweek*, June 23-29, 2014: 16-18.

⁷¹ Rudaw, *KRG Official: 2016 Could Be Even Harder For Kurdistan*, December 20, 2015, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/201220153>.

Without a consistent funding stream, the Kurds do not have the ability to provide the basic services to the Kurdish people. In the face of the shortfalls, the Kurds rely on multiple outside sources to provide the necessary capital to fund the Kurdish Government. Those sources include subsidies from the GOI Federal system specified in the articles of the Iraqi Constitution, grants from International Non-Government Organizations, and direct aid from the United States. Examples of these programs include the development of a regional power grid and the construction of a fiber optic network for communication. International efforts have also developed the civil policing capability and broadened the military through the train, advise, assist, and equip methods of the US and international contractors. USAID and the World Bank have further subsidized the KRG with funding for training local governance, policy and decision-making, service provision, and programs for infrastructure management and building.⁷² For a state on the verge of independence, the KRG's government infrastructure requires massive international subsidies in order to operate and provide for the Kurdish people.

The KRG's government infrastructure also faces significant challenges. Since 1975, two major parties, the KDP and the PUK, have composed the KRG. With the advent federal autonomy and with little GOI interference, the KRGs political machine has evolved to include no fewer than eight parties. The KRG also provides support to Syrian-Kurds and Turkish-Kurds, providing aid for the fight against ISIS.⁷³ While the old guard of the KRG is content to focus on the region of northern Iraq, many of the younger Kurds in the region see the fight against ISIS as an opportunity to consolidate the populations. This mindset is dangerous to the region as it could

⁷² Denise Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State: Development and Dependency in Post-Gulf War Iraq* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 83-84.

⁷³ *The Economist*. "Kurdistan: Ever Closer To Independence," February 21, 2015, accessed March 17, 2016. <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21644167-iraqs-kurds-are-independent-all-name-they-must-play-their-cards-cleverly-if-they>

destabilize an already tenuous relationship between KRG and the governments of Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq. In Turkey, the politics of the Kurds is changing. The PKK has publicly renounced its previous Marxist ideology in the interest of self-determination and one Kurdistan.⁷⁴

The disparate political views that exist between the varied Kurdish regions present a distinct challenge for the international community to decipher. It is a challenge that is impossible to overcome until the Kurds of Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran coalesce under similar national goals and policies. Each region follows its own political manifesto, seeks its own economic funding streams, and approaches the political diaspora through completely dissimilar methods. The lack of a functioning economy, the disparate nature of Kurdish politics, and the growing conflict with ISIS obstruct any effort by the KRG to achieve independence as a capable member of the international community.

⁷⁴ *The Economist*. "Turkey's Kurdish Rebels A Dramatic Change," February 15, 2015, accessed March 18, 2016. <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21644168-role-turkeys-main-kurdish-guerrilla-party-shifting-remarkably-dramatic-change>

Conclusion

Four factors stand in the way of the creation of an independent Kurdistan. Those factors are Kurdish history, insolvable border issues, Kurdish internal political strife, and Kurdish inability to behave as an independent state. Whether it is a self-declaration of independence or an international effort to carve out a nation for the Kurds, the nations of the Middle East must accept Kurdistan as a nation first.

The Middle East region, and particularly Iraq, does not practice pragmatic international relations. Decision-making is based on the historical narrative of the region, which leads to a vendetta approach in dealing with each nation. There is little forgiveness for past transgressions among the nations of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Each of these nations has long-standing issues with the Kurds within their sovereign territory and with the Kurdish Regional Government. After nearly of century of armed conflict, demeaning policies, and subjugation, each nation directly involved with the borders of Kurdistan has shown no willingness to grant Kurdish appeals for independence.

The history of the Kurds is a constant reminder of animosity, pain, and spiteful attacks. Even in the face of fighting ISIS, countries such as Turkey, Iraq, and Syria question Kurdish motives and refuse to interpret Kurdish efforts as solely intended to defeat ISIS. Those nations are well aware that the Kurds have historically exploited political discord and armed conflict in the region.⁷⁵ During the past one hundred years each time the Kurds attempted to declare independence the Kurdish dream has been crushed. Mahabad in Iran, Rojava in Syria, the southeastern region of Turkey, and in the semi-autonomous region of northern Iraq the Kurds faced deadly defeats in their attempts to achieve autonomy. On multiple occasions, the most

⁷⁵ Aaron Stein and Michelle Foley, *The YPG-PKK Connection*, January 16, 2016, accessed March 4, 2016. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-ypg-pkk-connection?tmpl=component>.

glaring defect in the Kurds ability to achieve success has been the Kurdish inability to create a sense of unity or nationalism.

The Kurds have not only struggled with international and regional actors, but also they have constantly struggled within Kurdish culture over ideology, independence, political goals, and economic distribution. The Kurdish ideology is so disparate that it ranges from self-determination and democracy to socialism and Marxism. Each national grouping of Kurds views Kurdish-autonomy and independence through a different lens. Nevertheless, countries such as Turkey and the United States view the Kurds as a single entity. Turkey views the PKK as a subset of the KRG, because it believes that the KRG ostensibly provided support to all PKK activities. The United States, currently entwined in the fight against ISIS, bases its activities out of Erbil in northern Iraq, but provides support to the KRG, the YPG in Syria, and the PKK in southern Turkey. This conglomeration by international actors confuses the situation within the KRG and further demonstrates the lack of political unity within the Kurdish culture.

Finally, the world cannot support a politically and economically dependent Kurdistan. Kurdistan does not possess the resources, infrastructure of national bureaucracy to support an independent nation. As Barzani alluded to in 1963, it is better for the Kurds to exist with their Arab neighbors than to struggle to survive. In five years since the United States left Iraq, the KRG has amassed \$15 to \$18 billion in debt.⁷⁶ Using only disputed oil funds from the Kirkuk region, the Kurds face a daunting task of rebuilding the infrastructure within the KRG and other war-torn Kurdish enclaves. At the same time, the KRG is the central funding and coordination point for the fight against ISIS. The United States and the international community cannot

⁷⁶ Isabel Coles, *Economic 'Tsunami' Undermines War Against Islamic State In Iraq - Kurdish Deputy PM*, January 16, 2016, accessed January 30, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-kurds-economic-idUSKCN0UU0GS>.

provide the requisite support for the KRG to overcome these two fundamental issues. In order for the Kurds to be achieve their goal, they have to prove that they can be politically and financially independent.

The assumption that Kurdish independence will bring peace to the Middle East does not take into account the irrevocable obstacles that exist between the regional history, the lack of available territory, the lack of Kurdish unity, or the inability of a Kurdish state to provide military, social, and economic programs for its people without heavy international assistance. It would be foolish for the United States to support Kurdish independence without the full support of the international and regional communities. Until there is unity in the world for Kurdish independence, the Kurds must remain the subjects of the nations in which they live.

Bibliography

- Anderson, Liam and Gareth Stansfield. *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004.
- British Broadcasting Company Monitoring . "Turkey v Syria's Kurds v Islamic State." *British Broadcasting Company*. February 19, 2016. Accessed April 7, 2016.
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33690060>.
- Bruinessen, Martin van. "Kurdish Society, Ethnicity, Nationalism and Refugee Problems." In *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, by Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl, 33-67. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Coles, Iasabel. "Economic 'Tsunami' Undermines War Against Islamic State In Iraq - Kurdish Deputy PM." January 16, 2016. Accessed January 30, 2016.
<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-kurds-economic-idUSKCN0UU0GS>.
- Eccarius-Kelly, Vera. *The Militant Kurds: A Dual Strategy for Freedom*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011.
- Encyclopædia Britannica. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc. 2016. Accessed April 7, 2016. <http://www.britannica.com/event/Montevideo-Convention>.
- Fromkin, David. *A Peace to End All Peace*. New York: Henry Holt, 1989.
- Fuller, Graham E. "The Fate of the Kurds." *Foreign Affairs* (Council of Foreign Relations) 72, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 108-121.
- Gunter, Michael M. *The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: A Political Analysis*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
- . *The Kurds of Iraq*. New York: St. Martins Press, 1992.
- "Unrecognized de Facto States in World Politics: The Kurds." *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 20, no. 11 (Spring/Summer 2014): 161-178.
- Hacken, Richard. *The World War I Document Archive*. February 1996. Accessed January 19, 2016. http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Main_Page.
- Hanauer, Larry, Jeffrey Martini, and Omar Al-Shahery. *Managing Arab-Kurd Tensions in Northern Iraq after the Withdrawl of U.S. Troops*. Occasional Paper, Santa Monica: RAND: National Defense Research Institute, 2011.
- Hathaway, Jane & Karl K. Barbir. *The Arab Lands Under Ottoman Rule*. Harlow: Pearson & Longman, 2008.
- Hindley, Geoffrey. *Saladin: Hero of Islam*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2007.
- Kaplan, Robert D. *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells us about Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate*. New York: Random House, 2013.
- Khan, Adnan R. "Winning Against All Odds." *Macleans Magazine*, August 3, 2015: 32-36.
- King, Charles. "The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States." *World Politics* 53 (July 2001): 524-552.

- Koohi-Kamali, Fereshteh. "The Development of Nationalism in Iranian Kurdistan." In *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, by Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl, 171-192. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Kreyenbroek, Philip G., and Stefan Sperl. *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Lawrence, Quil. *Invisible Nation: How the Kurds' Quest for Statehood is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East*. New York: Walker & Company, 2008.
- Madih, Abas Ali. "The Kurds of Khorasan." *Iran & the Caucasus* 11, no. 1 (2007): 11-31.
- McDowall, David. *A Modern History of the Kurds*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004.
- McDowall, David. "The Kurdish Question: A Historical Review." In *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, by Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl, 10-32. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Natali, Denise. *The Kurdish Quasi-State: Development and Dependency in Post-Gulf War Iraq*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010.
- . *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005.
- New York Times*. "Turkey puts US on spot for backing Kurds." *Honolulu Star Advertiser*, February 19, 2016: A5.
- Olson, Robert. *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion 1880-1925*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989.
- Palka, Eugene. "Kurd-Arab Tensions Along the Green Line: Iraq's Roadblock to Long-Term Stability." *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, 39, no. 1 (2011): 16-32.
- Kurdish Institute of Paris. "www.institutkurde.org." January 18, 2016. Accessed January 18, 2016. <http://institutkurde.org>.
- Rudaw. "KRG Official: 2016 Could Be Even Harder For Kurdistan." December 20, 2015. Accessed March 17, 2016, <http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/201220153>.
- Schmidt, Dana Adams. *Journey Among Brave Men*. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1964.
- Spencer, Richard. "Who are the Kurds? A user's guide to Kurdish politics." *The Telegraph*, July 5, 2015.
- Stein, Aaron, and Michelle Foley. *The YPG-PKK Connection*. January 16, 2016. Accessed March 4, 2016. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-ypg-pkk-connection?tmpl=component>.
- The Economist. "Turkey's Kurdish Rebels A Dramatic Change" *The Economist*. February 21, 2015. Accessed March 18, 2016. <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21644168-role-turkeys-main-kurdish-guerrilla-party-shifting-remarkably-dramatic-change>.
- . *The Economist*. "Kurdistan: Ever Closer To Independence" *The Economist*. February 21, 2015. Accessed March 17, 2016. <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21644167-iraqs-kurds-are-independent-all-name-they-must-play-their-cards-cleverly-if-they>.
- The Editorial Board. *The New York Times*. January 14, 2016. Accessed March 17, 2016.

- http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/14/opinion/iraq-and-the-kurds-are-going-broke.html?_r=0.
- Urban, Richard. *A Sovereign Kurdistan Under International Law*. March 16, 2016. Accessed April 7, 2017. http://www.fairobserver.com/region/middle_east_north_africa/sovereign-kurdistan-international-law-89346/.
- Vanly, Ismet Cheriff. "The Kurds in Syria and Lebanon." In *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, by Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl, 143-170. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Yale Law School: Lillian Goldman Law Library. "The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy." Edited by Charles I. Bevans. 2008. Accessed April 7, 2016. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/intam03.asp.
- Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Iran: The Past, Present and Future*. London: Pluto Press, 2007.
- . *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People*. London: Pluto Press, 2007.
- Zalewski, Piotr. "A Petro State of their own for the Kurds." *Bloomberg Businessweek*, June 23-29, 2014: 16-18.